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HAPPY IN LIFE AND IN DEATH.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN REFERENCE TO THE DEATH OF

PRESIDENT GARFIELD,

AT THE FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA, ON

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1881,

By JOSEPH MAY,

Minister of the Church,

WITH THE ORDER OF SERVICE AND ADDRESS ON THE PUBLIC FAST DAY,

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26.

PRIVATELY PRINTED.

F. W. Holland

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NOTE.

President Garfield was assassinated on Saturday, July 2, 1881, and died on Monday, September 19, 1881.

Reference was made to the event in our pulpit, by the pastor, in remarks before the sermon of Sunday, July 3, and again, in prospect of the President's death, before the sermon of September 18. The following sermon was preached on the succeeding Sunday. On Monday, September 26th, in response to the proclamations of the President of the United States and of the Governor of Pennsylvania, a memorial service was conducted by the pastor, of which a synopsis is given at the close of this pamphlet, with the address delivered.

SERMON.

LAGENTATIONS, L. I.—“How is she become as a widow, she that was great among the nations !”

IS it from some source that is peculiar in our modern life, that our communities are the subject of such constantly recurring shocks and tides of feeling, glad or sorrowful ?

Or is it only that the means of instantaneous communication, involving us in sympathies now commensurate with the civilized world, and bringing upon us the strain of emotions arising in causes still proceeding, pour these floods upon us in their full strength and freshness ?

Probably, both things are true. Modern life, at least the life of our present epoch, with our denser population and vastly increased wealth, the general intelligence opening all subjects of interest to the entire community, is naturally increased in mental and moral intensity ; while that convenience of communication brings each new occasion of sympathy so promptly before us that there is scarcely an interval for the repose which—perhaps mistakenly,—we are apt to fancy as the habitual condition of older times. The modern individual sits before the drama and tragedy of *the world*,—the scenes unfolding in remotest countries almost as vivid to him as those enacting at his own door. At least, his whole country is now as near and present with him as was to his predecessor his city or village. This *magnitude* of modern excitements must certainly be an important element in their power to strain and exhaust us. The strifes of factions in ancient Rome, in mediæval Italy, in the France of the Huguenot period, in the England of Stuart days, were almost more heated than we experienced in our own Civil War. The element of personal feeling was more sharp and bitter in either ; particular events were more horrible. Yet, in either case, they came to the private individual more slowly ; a greater proportion of the people knew little or nothing of them ; usually, an event was almost historical before it was generally known. Now, every pulse beats simultaneously with every other, under the surge of emotions coursing in full tide through the many millions of a great people.

"Nothing so probable as the unexpected," was the political maxim of that strange leader in British affairs who a few months ago finished his dramatic career. It is said to have been the half-superstitious notion, also, of the man whose history, likewise very dramatic in many of its situations, and at last so deeply tragical, has just closed amid the profound sympathies of the entire world.

One year ago, and there was scarcely a visible probability that this particular citizen was to be selected for our Chief Magistracy. His name had been hardly more than mentioned as one of a score of possible candidates to replace in some emergency of wire-pulling more prominent aspirants. Accepted by the people with wide-spread satisfaction as a very fortunate choice, he entered upon his functions in a period of the greatest prosperity, of absolute peace, of no profound political divisions. The healing process had gone far and was advancing constantly farther between the great sections of the country, North and South. The one factious strife, in which he was partly involved, had been effectively quenched in an absurd *dénouement*. If, on the day of his inauguration, or as late as the bright morning when he left that Presidential Mansion, which has been a home of sorrow to so many of its occupants, to start upon his summer's tour of recreation, the President had been warned by some cynic of foreign birth, or, like Cæsar, by a wife's dream, that his fate was near, he could have had no responsive thought but one of most honestly derisive security. In his magnificent physical vigor, with the growing regard of a whole peaceful, generous, busy population, no life was safer than his, as, with the freedom which attends the personal doings of our high officials, he walked quietly to his train. In a moment, he became the victim of the most wanton, most utterly causeless, most pitiable assassination by which any monarch or magistrate was ever stricken down. He had before him the most terrible struggle for life in which any man, whose position has given him a place in history, was ever involved. Oh, irony of human fortunes! Who can pretend, in a case like this, to *understand* the theory of Providential dealings? What more can we do than cling to the strange, the superrational *faith* which still so wonderfully buoys up our human hearts, and which in our private griefs is the one anchor from despair? "God reigns," he had said himself when his great predecessor, the last oblation on the altar of

freedom, was even more suddenly cut off. "God reigns," and "God is God," is all we can say to-day, or a hundred times in our private lives, in the presence of the great anomalies of Providence. After all, it is only the tremendous contrasts of the picture, the publicity of the stage, which makes this tragedy harder than many another to accept, and yet believe that all is well.

It is not worth while here to dwell upon the crime in itself, except to refer to it summarily as an illustration of the power of morbid imagination in even a mind substantially sane. Students of such subjects are doubtless familiar with similar phenomena. If there is any private lesson for common men to learn from this miserable tragedy, it seems to be that of responsibility for our secret thoughts,—of the power and danger of uncontrolled imaginations. As an actual fact, it would appear to be strictly true that the world we severally dwell in is as much in each particular case the creation of our own minds as it is the objective work of God and of real causes. This agrees with the profound truth that all reality is spiritual. Practically, what we think of everything that it is to us. The true *locus* of moral responsibility is, therefore, in the government of the thoughts, the regulation of sentiments, the moulding of conceptions, under the guidance of clearly discerned facts, of positive truths, and of unmistakable principles. Where the line between sanity and insanity runs, is a difficult question for the expert. But it is actually crossed by the individual whensoever, by the habit of his mind, or by the indulgence of particular imaginations, he allows himself to drift from the world of objective realities into a region of facts distorted or created by his personal conceptions. At this recondite point, I say, the fundamental work of conscience is to be done ; and how important it is not merely this horribly flagrant instance exhibits, but the vast majority of less notable crimes, many prevailing vices, and even many of our mere private mistakes and faults.

One practical form which morbid imagination has widely taken, was illustrated in this dreadful case, and should be carefully considered. The criminal pleads a commission from Heaven. So does the foolish man who sought by like violence to avenge the victim. Innumerable crimes have in all times been committed under this delusion or pretext. Those who accept the doctrine of express revelations from God, or who press the idea of His

guidance of human souls beyond the realm of principles into the region of actual deeds, should mark the essential danger of acting on a motive which it is impossible to authenticate. He who allows himself to believe that any particular act whatever—be it good or evil,—is the express dictate of Providence, has departed from the domain of reason, and is giving the helm of his life to whim and vagary.

That the assassination of President Garfield arises from a source essentially irrational and crazy, while it gives it a character exquisitely pitiable, is yet, perhaps, the profoundest of the consolations which accompany it. As I remarked when the act was fresh, it had no political or social significance, and has presaged no public evils. For this we may be profoundly grateful.

On the contrary, the murder of the head of our Government has served to bring out and mark so unmistakably before the world the soundness of our political condition and the security of our institutions, it has borne such a witness to the virtues of democracy, that, so far from dying in vain, the President might almost have been willing to give his life that this witness should have been offered to the world. Even in many of us at home, a fresh and profounder confidence in a democratic social order has unquestionably been developed, as we have seen it bear, as it were so *naturally*, certainly so triumphantly, the strain of an unprecedented catastrophe. It has revealed imperfections in our written Constitution which may well enough be remedied. But it has shown that the true strength of all just government is in that unwritten law of reason and conscience which has worked so effectively in those who have had to assume responsibilities in this crisis, and in the whole people. Nothing but the brave patience of the sufferer himself could exceed the propriety and self-restraint which have marked the attitude of his successor, and from the unpopularity in which he was at one time involved have restored him to the generous confidence of the people. The democratic order is a sort of *family* government. It involves something of the same confusion and irregularity, the same necessity for occasional assumptions of authority. But so long as that generous patriotism endures, which has lain like a family love at the bottom of the domestic fret and jar of our prosperous times, and has never failed hitherto to come out in great emergencies, we shall be more

than safe without those artificial buttresses by which monarchical systems are everywhere and necessarily secured. I think we never had more marked occasion for confidence and generous pride in our institutions and in the peculiar traits of our national character. It may be said, with no exaggeration and in no boastful spirit, that no nation exists, or has ever existed, which for a period of months could continue without a head, the men actually conducting the Government being merely irresponsible clerical subordinates not known to the Constitution; the one man who might have claimed the place of authority abstaining with a reserve we may fairly call chivalrous, and yet in response to a public sentiment at once instinctive and imperious, from any demonstration in that direction. Such a spectacle will pass into history in close association with the sublime. Let us but give God the glory, who planted in our fathers' hearts the germs of ideas which have borne such admirable fruit. And, especially, let not passing trepidations seduce us into any action inconsistent with the principles out of which it has come. From the acts of maniacs it is impossible for any man to be protected. It would be a step in the direction of the characteristic danger—imperialism,—which always waits upon democracy, to invest the person of the Chief Magistrate of the time being with any sanctity but that of popular respect, or to limit or modify that dignified simplicity which has marked the personal habits of our high officials. One lesson of this disastrous time has been that of the real dignity of our Presidential office; of the undiminished respect for it which lives in the hearts of the people; and especially of the sufficiency of our institutions to care for its incumbent with a tenderness and abundance of external ministration which royalty could hardly have commanded. The wounded President was held in the arms of the whole people as a sick babe in the arms of its mother. No monarch's progress was ever so imposing as that hurrying train bearing him to a purer air when the conflict became desperate. By no imperial edict it flew to its destination, supplanting the business and convenience of every citizen, transporting the sufferer without a jar through anxious cities, across private pleasure-grounds, to a private door flung open to receive him as eagerly and lovingly as that of his own modest home! Its path was opened by a reverence for his office and a sympathy with his sufferings utterly

simple and genuine, commanding for him in the name of the whole people's pity the last resources of skill and care and wealth. We must foreclose such spontaneous workings of republican loyalty by no provisions which should in the least remove our Magistrates, in their persons, from their relation of simple membership to the body of the people. We want none of the divinity which doth hedge a king, but to keep that honest, willingly conceded deference for the occupant of a responsible post of service which is really reverence for the dignity of all great human interests—the respect of a nation for itself. We want to keep open the channels of that simple human kindness which flowed out upon the late President as upon a relative and personal friend, from every citizen of the republic. It is by nursing such sentiments that we shall strengthen and solidify our institutions.

And, so doing, we extend their influence far beyond our own limits. I doubt if any event ever did so much to recommend republicanism to Europeans as the sufferings of President Garfield have done. The occasion has been unique in calling out the sympathies of all peoples, and has even done something to promote the solidarity of mankind. Its effect in cementing the mutual regard of England and America has been precious. To subjects of kings and princes in their recent mood of feeling, it shall have taught a lesson of the essential dignity of all high positions as consisting in *service*; a lesson of the superfluity of artificial distinctions of rank and of inherited rulerships; a lesson, in a word, of the real trustworthiness of human nature and of men's capacity to manage their political affairs as well as their private business for themselves. Republicanism is no cure-all for the ills of human life. It has not averted the corruptions which cluster about all great interests. But once more, in a new and strange aspect, it has proved its practical sufficiency, in an educated community, to maintain order, to give sanctity to high functions, and to develop the finer virtues of a population.

To have been the instrument of such a testimony to institutions which he loved and of which his own character and career were a striking illustration, raises Mr. Garfield's death effectively to the dignity of a martyrdom. Add to this its effect in restoring sympathy between the long-alienated South and the Union, and in clearing the political air of the vapors which were obscuring our recent

days, and finally in creating one more ideal, however imaginative, yet not to be the less effective, of elevated and disinterested statesmanship, and I cannot think that in heaven the soul of the departed President can repine at its translation. Nor could a man who was capable of the manly fortitude, the religious submissiveness, with which he met his great disappointment and endured his terrible sufferings, undervalue the occasion of teaching a lesson of these personal virtues so impressive as his has been; while one of feelings so cordial might reverently bow in gratitude to Providence for an opportunity, by his extremest sufferings, so to twine about himself the close affections of a great people and the tender sympathies of the world. Whatever shall be the calm verdict of history as to his due position as a statesman, *as a man* he has justly earned in those terrible weeks of physical pain and mental trial the full meed of admiration and honor which he has received. This impulsive tribute to heroism and dignity will never be rescinded. He had scarcely been tried in his high official position. But he had time and occasion to show, by the stalwart courage, the unpretending yet unyielding patience of his sick bed; by his affectionate tenderness to those who ministered beside it; by glimpses of his loyalty to friends, and of the beautiful unity of his marriage relation; and by the manly simplicity which marked all his conduct from his nomination as President to his tragic end, no inadequate title, in the substantial qualities of his character, to that place in which he is doubtless permanently enshrined in the imagination of the people, beside Washington, the hero of the first great struggle for American liberty, and Lincoln, the martyr of the second.

To be made one of such a triad, surely, it were worth one's while to die. In the most selfish sense, as one contemplates President Garfield's history, he is to be congratulated upon its close. It was said of old that a man's greatest privilege is a fitting time to die. It is most certain that for this man a peaceful and prosperous administration offered no possible opportunity for immortality such as was purchased for him in the period of his disablement. And though a generous heart might well have craved the privilege of exhibiting by patriotic service its gratitude for the sympathy his sufferings have evoked, the most confident might have shrunk from the task of equalizing his accomplishments with the expectations

that have been aroused through the process of idealization which has already canonized him among the saints of our history. It seems to me it may sometimes be a shock for any sufferer to turn back from the near presence of heaven to the dusty ways of earth. To have done so with a shattered physique, with power of will and mental vigor impaired, as almost must have been the case for him we are contemplating, and so to take up the tremendous task of meeting the exacting expectations of popular love and admiration, would have been almost too much for humanity to attempt.

Let us then call the President happy in his death ! Yes, happy in his whole career. As it is known to the public, it was not perhaps, without its imperfections ; yet these, such as they were, seem to have been due more to temperament than to the lack of principle. Manly, vigorous, generously ambitious, his private life was pure, simple and genial, and he certainly passed through the trials of his public life with marked exemption from the defilements that cling to politics. He was hardly a *great* man ; his vision was not always clear ; his yielding disposition led him, it would seem, into occasional inconsistencies. But his aims were generous and elevated, and during a long public service he certainly preserved the reputation of a politician of the better sort. Sustaining that painful pressure of comparative poverty in public life which is one of the minor but serious difficulties of our democratic system, he remained poor in a position where not a few have found it possible to make great fortunes without wholly forfeiting the public confidence ; and he would have left his family destitute, but for the swift generosity of the people, even anticipating his death. There is no doubt of his sincere and ardent patriotism, his thorough sympathy with American ideas. He was thoroughly manly ; he had been master in his own career and had made conditionally yield to character. The composure with which he met the sudden assault of his assassin, and the fortitude with which he bore the pain and weariness of so many weeks, and viewed the prospect of death, only paralleled the personal courage which he had displayed during his military service, and especially in the battle which gave him his soldierly fame, and on the anniversary of which he died. In his domestic life there was the truest felicity ; his marriage and parenthood were a model of conjugal and family virtue ; and it may be said that the simple affection which he was not ashamed, on the most public

and conspicuous occasions to manifest for his wife and venerable mother, with the tenderness of their devotion to him, gave the last impulse to that surge of popular affection which has henceforth enshrined them all as no *family* was ever before taken up into public regard.

It was a typical American career,—one of a thousand others which have proved the virtue of the stock from which we spring, and have illustrated the possibilities that are ever lodged in character beyond the utmost hostility of circumstances. He began with absolutely no adventitious helps. His youth was almost passed before he could fluently read. His avocations up to that time were as humble as fall to the lot of man and surrounded by the temptations through which poverty and isolation so readily degrade men. But his mother's blood stirred in him and waked *the man*. Quickly conquering the rudiments of an education, he starts for college with fifteen dollars in his pocket, (ten of which he almost loses by the way,) a modern knight-errant,—a new Whittington. In five years, he is teaching others ancient tongues. In seven, he has taken, with honors, a bachelor's degree in a respectable college, and is professor of languages and literature in the modest institution where his higher studies began. Henceforth, his history is but the ordinary course of rising men, for which the circumstances of our country have so generously provided. But it was all the fruit of his own ambition, energy, persistence and talent, and he is entitled to its praise.

Of such careers,—of the possibility of them,—we may well be proud. They, and not our great crops and mighty highways, are the grand things America has to show to the world. They are our *characteristic* product. And it is nothing strange that the executive office passes to the hands of another of the same class. It is a type which, like every type, has its characteristic defects. Especially, it misses the *chastening* influence of thorough education in the "humane arts," particularly the history of the past. Yet from among this class, our country through, have come not merely our enterprising men of affairs, but some of our noblest examples of virtue. Indeed, in every land, while circumstances may favor, the really great man must be self-made. And it is out of this class that everywhere the *leaders* of men are being recruited.

And so, once more, we look on that spectacle, forever solemn, mysterious, suggestive,—an ended life! Strange the drama always!

What a marvel that the infinitesimal physical germ should so expand into the grand complicated organism, full of force, instinct with activity,—fit dwelling-place of the thinking, dreaming, aspiring, restless soul! How dramatic almost any human history! Through what contingencies, physical and moral, we all pass! What interweaving of destinies! What hopes, what sorrows, what fears, what joys, what perturbations! And then,—stillness, peace! Lay aside the rent garment,—hide the features we loved,—*the man* is gone! Some grander work has beckoned him, a broader opportunity, a finer hope! There is a strange dignity in the act of dying. How little all one's achievements, one's restless desires, how contemptible one's possessions seem now!

“Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.”

The President's end is a startling reminder of the never-learned uncertainty of human life. “All men think all men mortal but themselves.” Curious delusion of vitality! We meet and mourn him; to-morrow we may be where he is! It ought to check sensuality and avarice; it ought to make benevolence easy; it ought to give us a facile patience; it ought to spur us to diligence in whatever we would do for the world. The time for us all is short.

Yet, I do not think *the change* should seem very great to us. I cannot think of it as altering aught that is essential or important to us. It is but a shifting of scenery—the soul must remain itself.

So it should be viewed with calmness for ourselves, and, when it takes from us our dear ones, with perfect confidence that all is well with them. And though it must sometimes desolate life for us beyond our power to regain its pristine cheer, still even death is not quite enough to rob us of our confidence in God.

In that, as a people, we may amply repose. To the perfection of wisdom and goodness we commend the spirit of our departed Magistrate, fellow-citizen, brother! To the infinite tender love whence came the brightness of her former days, we commend the bruised heart of her to whom he was not President, was not statesman, but the other portion of herself; now torn from her, leaving her bleeding. She, too, has been privileged to teach us a lesson. May the pity of God be with her; may His grace enwrap and strengthen her, and may His wisdom inspire and guide her children! *Amen.*

ORDER OF EXERCISES AT THE SERVICE FIELD
ON THE PUBLIC FAST DAY, MONDAY,
SEPTEMBER 26, 1881.

ORDER OF EXERCISES.

Organ Voluntary.

Scripture Sentences.

Anthems from Psalms XXXIX. and XC., read by the Minister.

COLLECT.

Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of those who depart hence in the Lord ; and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity ; we give Thee hearty thanks for the good examples of all those Thy servants, who, having finished their course in faith, do now rest from their labors. And we beseech Thee, that we, with all those who are departed in the true faith of Thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss in Thy eternal and everlasting glory, through Thy great mercy. Amen.

Hymn 465—"Hearken, Lord, to my Complaints."

Reading from the Old Testament.

Choir Piece.

Poetical Selection—"Go to the grave in all thy glorious prime,
In full activity of zeal and power."

Reading from the New Testament.

Hymn 502 (to tune "America,")—"Lowly and solemn be
Thy children's cry to thee."

Poetical Selection—Wordsworth's "Character of the Happy
Warrior."

Address by the Minister.

COLLECTS.

O merciful God and heavenly Father, who hast taught us that Thou dost not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, look with pity, we beseech Thee, upon the sorrows of Thy servants, the family of the late President of these United States. In Thy wisdom Thou hast seen fit to visit them with trouble and to bring distress upon them. Remember them, O Lord, in mercy ; sanctify Thy Fatherly correction to them ; endue their souls with patience under their affliction and with resignation to Thy blessed will ; comfort them with a sense of Thy goodness ; lift up Thy countenance upon them and give them peace, through Thy great mercy. Amen.

Almighty God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite, have mercy upon this land and all that dwell therein, and so rule the hearts of Thy servants, the President of the United States, and all others in authority over us, that they, remembering whose ministers they are, may, above all things, seek Thy honor and glory, and that we, duly considering whose authority they bear, may honor and obey them, in Thee and for Thee, according to Thy blessed Word and Ordinance. Amen.

O God, whose days are without end, and whose mercies cannot be numbered, make us, we beseech Thee, deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of human life ; and let Thy Holy Spirit lead us through this vale of misery, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our lives ; that, when we shall have served Thee in our generation, we may be gathered unto our fathers, having the testimony of a good conscience ; in the communion of the Catholic Church ; in the confidence of a certain faith ; in the comfort of a reasonable, religious and holy hope ; in favor with Thee, our God, and in perfect charity with the world. Amen.

Choir Piece.

Hymn 496—"Abide with me, fast falls the even-tide."

Benediction.

ADDRESS.

AND now we stand among innumerable mourners by the grave-side of our President. There is little more that need be spoken. He is at peace—God rest his soul! An honest man, a good citizen, a pure husband, a faithful father. His career is closed.

Nay, not closed. One act is finished. Shall we think all that force, all that virtue, all that hope, *ended*? Rather is their course only begun. That honorable career, cut off on earth, was but an infancy, whereof a glorious growth, a full maturity, shall proceed to noble fruition, the unending fruition of eternity in heaven.

Peace to his ashes! Progress, joy, blessedness for the immortal soul! The dust shall repose in the grave; already the spirit has begun its course on high.

He finished his course here well. He was bold, earnest, aspiring, persistent, patient. He withstood the temptations of youth and used its opportunities with fidelity. He stood manfully among men, and did his duty when called to sacrifices and to responsibilities. He rose through successive stations of honor, with modesty and simplicity. He entered upon the highest earthly station, the headship of a free people, without petty elation, in an earnest sense of duty, with noble prospects of an honorable career.

God called him hence in the very prime and beauty of his life. Let us think of him as needed elsewhere. Whatsoever God doeth is well.

Nor let the tragic method of his taking off seem to us less providential than the most natural translation should have been. All is of God; the pestilence that stalketh in darkness, the arrow that flieth by day, the bullet speeding to its terrible destination, all,—how, we cannot understand,—yet all are His.

Forbear from hatred and revenge toward the miserable agent of this destruction and this woe. To God belongeth vengeance. He will repay. But his repaying is not of malice or revenge. It shall be the saving, cleansing penalty of redemption, through salt contrition, through remorseful tears. Ah, pity for that unhappy soul! May God pity him! Let us pity him! and pitying, forgive!

One spasm of a vengeful spite should mar the solemn harmony of a world's grief welling on high to-day.

We bury our President,—yea, let us bury more. Let us bury sectional jealousy ; let us bury political corruption ; let us bury selfish greed of place ; let us bury all unholiness.

So may the blood of this latest martyr be the fruitful seed of a religious, a sacred state, a people whose God shall be the Lord of purity, truth and brotherly love.

Let us tenderly and especially remember, as we grieve, those who this day grieve the most. Remember the widow ; remember the orphans. Ah, the sorrow that is theirs ! Let us not unveil it. But let its sanctity touch us. Let the chastisement of their peace be upon us.

Thanks be to God ! The President is dead ! *The President lives !* The State is secure !

Secure from outward harm ; from intestinal divisions. In danger only from itself ; from ourselves. May God protect us. May God redeem us from all iniquity. As to our fathers, so be God to us. God save our State. *Amen.*



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